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This is the author's manuscript

Original Citation:

Availability:

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/1565035> since 2016-06-09T11:10:53Z

Publisher:

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université
de **BORDEAUX**

Oeno
2015

10^e Symposium International
d'Oenologie de Bordeaux
du 29 juin au 1er juillet 2015

PROGRAMME

*10th International Symposium
of Enology of Bordeaux*



Sous le patronage de
**l'Organisation Internationale
de la Vigne et du Vin**



Du 29 juin au 1er juillet 2015

« ŒNO 2015 »
10e édition du Symposium International d'Œnologie
Bordeaux du 29 juin au 1er juillet 2015

III-14

Communication : Workshop Microbiologie 2

Thèmes : Microorganismes du raisin et du vin

**ISOLATION, SELECTION, AND CHARACTERIZATION OF AUTOCHTHONOUS OENOCOCCUS
OENI STRAINS ACCORDING TO THEIR OENOLOGICAL PROPERTIES**

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Mots clés : *Oenococcus oeni*, starter, pH, malic acid,

The lactic acid bacterium *Oenococcus oeni*, mainly responsible for malolactic fermentation (MLF), is used in new winery process as starter culture for direct inoculation. Induction of MLF by inoculation with commercially available strains of *O. oeni* is not always successful, because wine is a very harsh environment for bacterial growth. Thus, the use of an autochthonous starter culture well-adapted to the conditions of a specific wine-producing area has been recommended.

One hundred and twenty-one strains of *Oenococcus oeni* were isolated during the spontaneous malolactic fermentation of Barbera wines from Monferrato area, the analysis of fingerprinting using the (GTG)₅ primer ((GTG)₅-PCR) revealed the existence of sixteen different biotypes. The goal of this study is to carry out a characterization of these *Oenococcus oeni* strains, in order to select those showing the highest potential as oenological starter cultures. Various oenological properties like tolerance to low values of pH, to high content of ethanol and to SO₂ concentration were analyzed. Forty % of the tested strains were able to grow and consume malic acid at pH of 3.2 and at 13% of ethanol. The seven strains that produced the best results, on the basis of these properties, were chosen for analyse effects of the interaction between three autochthonous yeast strain used to conduct alcoholic fermentation in simulated laboratory microvinifications.

Three strains showed the highest implantation values. On the basis of this characterization, three strains have been selected which are suitable as starter cultures for MLF of Barbera wine.

Acknowledgements: This study is part of the EU project WildWine: Multi-strain indigenous yeast and bacteria starter for wild-ferment wine production, funded in the FP 7 under grant agreement n. 315065- WILDWINE (wildwine.eu).